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SUBJECT: TURKEY LESS OPTIMISTIC ON PAKISTAN FOLLOWING
ZARDARI VISIT

REF: ANKARA 1166

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) The GOT is more pessimistic about the prospect for Pakistani political unity following Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Zardari's June 27-28 visit, according to MFA Section Head Ilhan Sener. Zardari, who stopped in Turkey enroute to Socialist International meetings in Athens, explained to PM Erdogan and President Gul that his inaction against President Musharraf is costing him popularity within his ruling coalition and among the Pakistani people. Pakistan's Ambassador to Ankara participated in all of Zardari's official meetings, including meetings with opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Baykal and Education Minister Celik, who co-chairs the Pakistan-Turkey economic commission.

¶2. (C) Sener said Zardari did not give the impression that he plans to act against Musharraf immediately, but that his patience is running short; at his meeting with Erdogan, Zardari reportedly called Musharraf a "goddamned dictator" and a "burden on my shoulders."

¶3. (C) Zardari was, to the Turks' disappointment, noncommittal about President Musharraf and PM Gillani attending the next Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey "Ankara Summit," even though Pakistani FM Qureshi had reportedly agreed to this idea, in principle, during a June 20 meeting with FM Babacan at the OIC FMs meeting in Kampala. PM Erdogan reportedly told Zardari he planned to be at the table at the next summit, as he was in April 2007, and would like for Gillani to attend. Erdogan reinforced the strong message of solidarity this would send and urged Zardari not to lose more time on domestic bickering; Zardari offered no response. The Turks are not optimistic that Zardari will be able to countenance his PM and Musharraf on the same stage. Sener noted that a PM-only summit was not possible; it would be a downgrade from the last summit (and Afghanistan has no PM).

¶4. (C) Addressing the rumor that Musharraf will "retire" in Turkey, Sener noted Musharraf's fate largely depends on how long the Pakistani army remains loyal to him. Sener would not speculate, but said he expects a "face-saving exit," when the time comes. The Turkish military, he observed, has extensive and close contacts with its Pakistani counterpart, but even it seems perplexed. The Turkish military is asking MFA for talking points on Pakistan, though Sener would not comment as to whether or not it actually uses them.

¶5. (C) Zardari's public remarks underscored close Pakistani-Turkish relations, extending beyond Musharraf. "The Pakistani people love and admire Turkey," he told journalists, and closed his press statement with the remark, "Long live friendship between Turkey and Pakistan." In addition to visiting former President Turgut Ozal's family in Istanbul, Zardari also called on former PM Tansu Ciller. "Ciller was a close personal friend of my late wife Benazir Bhutto," he told the press. "I want to show my gratitude for the friends who did not leave me alone after the death of Benazir."

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